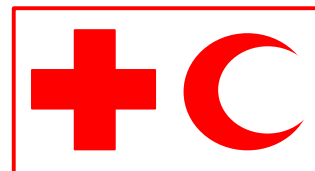


International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



A brief testimonial to
The United States Senate

14th. September
2005

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

By

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent
Societies

On

"Recovering from Hurricane Katrina: The next phase"

The International Federation of the Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies, the IFRC, would like to thank the US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs for their invitation to testify at this hearing. If I may first say, the President and the Secretary General of the International Federation have asked that, on behalf of the 181 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world, I convey our most heart-felt condolences and thoughts to the people of the US, and more especially to those families and individuals directly affected and so devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is dedicated to responding to assist and help in the recovery for those impacted by the consequences of natural and man-made disasters through "the power of humanity," our mission statement. We are only too familiar with the images we have seen these past weeks and from other disasters around the world: the Tsunami, the earthquakes in Bam and Gujarat, Rwanda, the Balkans, hurricanes Mitch and Ivan, and so many others. Throughout the devastated area and indeed around the US the American Red Cross, a founding member of the International Federation, is deeply committed to carrying out an outstanding humanitarian relief operation, the largest in their history, and it is both an honour and duty that 156 of us from 80 Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world, the International Federation and the ICRC have been asked by the American Red Cross to assist them in this enormous and critical task. Equally, as the waters of disaster recede, the need to rebuild lives, property and above all hope must take priority. It is with that challenge in mind that we would like to share with you some of the experiences, observations, lessons and thinking the Red Cross has for your consideration on your way forward.

What next?

Recovery must be able to link the emergency phase with the long-term development process. During the recovery process, special attention must be given not just to reconstruction infrastructure, hospitals, schools and, homes but it has to foster economic revitalisation and hope and a belief in a better future. This can be achieved in many ways, through support to small businesses and assistance to the local economy, credit schemes, loans and incentives. Regardless if it is a farmer in Ethiopia, a fisherman in Sri Lanka, a restaurant worker in New Orleans or a doctor in Bam, the first priority for victims is to re-establish their livelihoods and to regain control over their lives, and they should be supported in the recovery of productive assets. Attention must also be given to restoring social services and rebuilding local infrastructure. The recovery process should identify areas for initial impact, and seek to support a return to normalcy before reconstruction begins. Nevertheless, post-disaster recovery should not be a simple restoration of pre-existing livelihoods and infrastructure. Instead, it should be treated as an opportunity to implement better development policies and to "build back better" and to strengthen individual faith and confidence.

How?

- **Spontaneous recovery.** The spontaneous recovery carried out by individual communities should be recognised and supported. Regulatory frameworks and recovery should support this. It is an incredible fact that within days of establishing shelter, water and food following even the most devastating disasters in Bam and Banda Aceh there is always a part, and often a large part of the population whose natural resilience and positive determination motivate them to getting back to normal, establishing business, seeking jobs, moving on. Equally there are those who are the opposite, seemingly rendered helpless. Recovery needs to recognise and address both those realities.
- **Inclusive recovery.** Populations both directly and indirectly affected by a disaster must be identified and taken into consideration in recovery plans. It is important to not isolate an affected population, as doing so can cause resentment and tension between those assisted and those not eligible for assistance. Recovery initiatives must be participatory. The community affected, be it those in New York City contemplating the reconstruction of the World Trade Center or a remote fishing village on the coast of Papua New Guinea recovering from a Tsunami, even in post-Bam Iran where a highly centralised form of management might have been anticipated, headway in the recovery phase would have been handicapped severely without the buy-in of those communities. They all needed to feel they were a part of what will become of their new community; they need to feel a genuine sense of ownership. After Mitch, Gujarat, Afghanistan, almost all post-disaster communities in fact, some form of national consultation that involves the community groups and leaders, the traditional artisans or builders needed to be included in the process.
- **Sustainable recovery.** Recovery efforts must help build capacity at the local, regional and national level. They should seek to support and strengthen local governance mechanisms. They should also seek to build to support the resilience of those affected, through activities such as income generation, vocational training, employment, and credit. Post-disaster recovery interventions need to be timely to be effective yet at the same time authorities cannot be driven purely by the need to be seen to be “doing something.” The opportunity to review and improve on risk reduction, disaster preparedness, response plans, hazards and risk mapping, training and simulations exercises will never reach a more aware public than at this stage. Communities can and most certainly should be rebuilt to be more resilient to natural hazards. Previous environmental, industrial or social risk factors can be mitigated or even eliminated. For the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, indeed any reasonable thinking person, to rebuild communities and lives without addressing the underlying causes of the devastation – whether weak constructions as found in Turkey, unplanned urbanisation in Venezuela or Bangladesh, or unprepared populations as in the Indian Ocean would be tantamount to humanitarian malpractice.
- **Needs-based recovery.** Recovery must take into account specific vulnerabilities of certain populations and the specific challenges faced by particular groups (i.e. single parent-headed households, those left handicapped such as in Bam and after the earthquake in Turkey). Natural disasters primarily and most critically affect the poor and vulnerable, and can further entrench poverty. Recovery must avoid creating the same inequities that existed before. In most situations the Red Cross/Red Crescent works it is clear that a gender dimension must be mainstreamed into recovery plans. Sensitive issues such as culture, tribal, race or ethnicity further complicate the process but cannot be ignored without reinstating or even aggravating pre-inequities.

Some other thoughts:

- **Coordination:** Establishing coordination in the midst of a disaster is difficult, often seemingly impossible, but when it is achieved it will lay the foundation for the continued coordination essential between authorities: local, regional and national. It will establish long-term relationships and information platforms with the participating agencies, banks and funding institutions, donors and above all the very public it seeks to help bring normalcy back into their lives and hopefully a better life.

- **Building back better:** Regardless of how devastating a disaster or the development status of the country affected, every such event offers a unique opportunity to not just build back better homes and schools but to bring in new livelihoods, new opportunities, new hope from what seemed total despair. Indeed ironically in some cases the very disaster itself broke the cycle of poverty, and improved infrastructure. In Afghanistan and Angola better schools meant not just buildings but green space, play areas, bigger and less crowded classrooms. In the Mitch-impacted countries improved the living conditions improved and in Bangladesh and Vietnam the Red Cross coastal mangrove planting projects improved the environment and above all strengthened resistance to and preparedness against cyclones. Building back better means more trade opportunities such as the possibility espoused by President Clinton in his current role as the UN Special Envoy for the Tsunami to invigorate the housing business and construction trades training conditions through the rebuilding of the Tsunami affected communities.
- **Relocation of displaced populations:** The relocation of affected populations both from and back to devastated areas is fraught with sensitivity. Some affected people will never return; some will never leave. Both extremes need to be managed. The man in Bam who refused to leave the pile of rubble that used to be his house and under which his family laid to move to a new home is no different than his fellow casualty today in New Orleans, adrift in a water logged and sinking bungalow; for both it is their home, their castle ... their roots. To evacuate, to them, is the same as perishing. The process is often snarled up in security, mandatory evacuation dilemmas, land rights, acquisitions and titles, objections and feelings of threat and jealousy from host populations. Authorities can be challenged with the need to find new land, to assess environmental and additional disaster risks (to ensure there is not return to the previous vulnerability), to assure a source of work and transportation, and with many other challenges. Transitions from sudden homelessness to tents or temporary shelter to semi-permanent hotels or other accommodation to, finally, new homes are sensitive and take a long time, too long for most victims.
- **The role of business and the private sector in disaster management:** The Tsunami has demonstrated more than ever that business and the private sector have a significant role to play in both response and post disaster recovery. Whilst in developed countries this may seem more obvious, in less-developed areas this is a new and promising source of aid. Opportunities arise in supply chain, logistics, materials, technology and human resources, micro-credit and entrepreneurial support.

A final word from Johan Schaar, the Special Representative of the International Federation's Secretary General for the Tsunami

“Whether Katrina was America’s tsunami is debatable, what is true of both, and is so in most disasters, is the endless grief of those who lost loved ones, the courage of the rescue and relief workers , tens of thousands of volunteers and the selfless generosity of strangers who opened their doors and gave of themselves to help those in need”

“Every one devastated by disaster or conflict be they Iraqi, Indonesian, Sudanese, Grenadian or American has the same need for dignity, to stay together as a family and a community, to see their privacy respected, not be forced to live in cramped and unsanitary conditions during their weakest moment and above all to believe that they will recover and that a better life of simple dignity with reduced risks awaits them.”